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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that students spend more time before the television set than in school, this monograph evaluates television as a potential resource in the teaching of English. The nine articles in the collection (1) discuss the effect of massive television viewing on children in and out of the classroom; (2) examine the students' need to apply critical thinking skills to their television viewing; (3) describe activities and materials designed to develop these cognitive skills in students at all levels; and (4) list various books and organizations offering further information on television and the schools. The articles suggest that rather than being a liability, television, if intelligently used, can serve as a highly motivating tool in teaching both critical thinking skills and literature. (MM)

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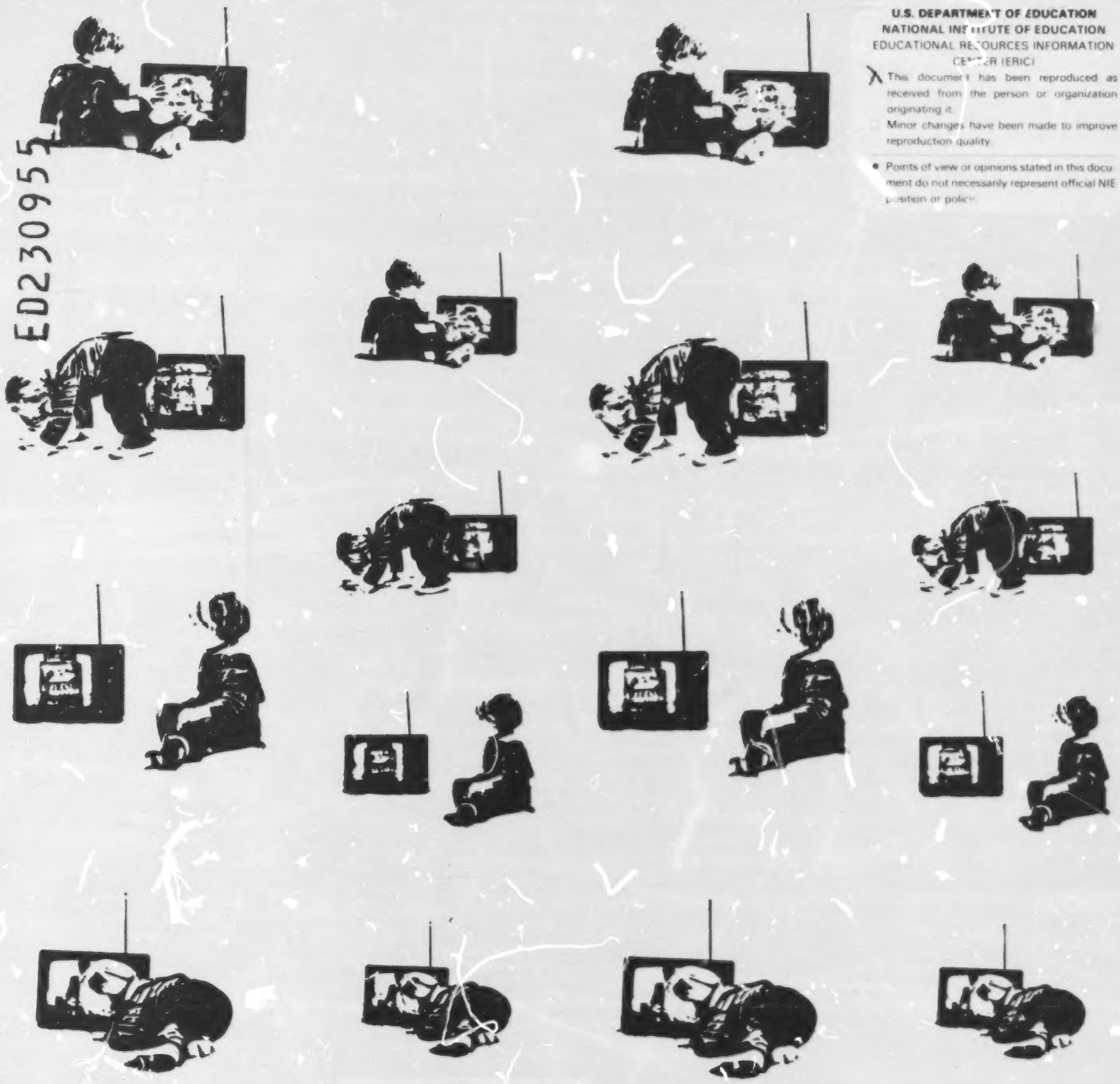

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Television and Teaching English

CS 207 618

TELEVISION AND THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

Edited by

Rhoda Maxwell

Michigan Council of Teachers of English

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INTRODUCTION

Like the little fellow on the cover, children develop an early fascination with the wonders of television--a fascination that grows rather than diminishes through the years. The consequences of television viewing can be, and often are, undesirable. Yet, television can be used creatively in the English classroom. The authors of this monograph write about ways that television can enrich and enliven the teaching of English.

Elizabeth James, in her article, quotes startling figures for the number of television-watching hours logged by children. With their vulnerability little children are at the mercy of programmers and advertisers. The film, Kids for Sale, by Action for Children's Television, depicts a poignant view of how children perceive and react to television. At one point in the film a little girl is asked what she would do if someone took her television away. A thoughtful expression comes over her face and with quiet determination she says, "I would hurt them." This depth of feeling is indicative of how important television figures in many children's lives.

Because children relate to what they watch, there is concern about the effect on children of violence on television. In the July, 1982, issue of SLATE, a summary report shows increased evidence that viewing violence has a very negative effect on children. Because of the importance of the report, the article from SLATE follows this introduction.

I believe it is imperative that we help young people become more critical viewers. A subtitle of this book could have been, "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em." One of the points Robert Root makes in his essay on the importance of teaching television is that we can't divorce learning from experience and television is a significant part of most students' experience.

Students can be helped to make informed judgments about the quality of what they are watching. David England, in an article in English Journal (November, 1979), argued for teaching students how to be critically selective of prime time television. Basing his

discussion on four, then popular, shows he identifies criteria for a quality series as:

1. the principal characters grow and mature in insight and understanding;

2. there are strong family contexts and a support system which evolves from interaction with others;

3. characters are sensitive to others and demonstrate a wide and honest array of human emotions -- human acts have human consequences.

The series England identified as having these characteristics ("Little House on the Prairie," "Happy Days," "Family," and "All in the Family") did not depend on sex and violence for plot and entertainment, but rather on characters who were multifaceted and complex. He lists questions and issues based on these four series for teachers to use. Teachers could create similar plans for any show that meets the criteria England has described.

Analyzing advertisements seen on television is also a way of developing young people's critical thinking and raising their consciousness of the appeals being directed at them. Teaching about television helps students make more informed choices. Teaching with television helps the teacher make the classroom an interesting place. Television, with its strong motivational appeal and common meeting ground, is an excellent vehicle for the study of literature. The authors of this monograph have written about all of these aspects of television and the teaching of English: teaching critical thinking skills through television, using television as a motivator in teaching, and teaching literature through the medium of television.

Rhoda Maxwell
Michigan State University

LINKS BETWEEN TV-VIEWING, BEHAVIOR: EVIDENCE MOUNTS

The announcement in May of new findings about the influence of TV violence on youthful behavior appears to strengthen the cases of organizations campaigning for more awareness of the potential of TV for behavior modification.

The new report came from the National Institute of Mental Health. According to the Associated Press, it found "evidence that violence on television leads to aggressive behavior by children and teen-agers" to be "overwhelming." The new study, "Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties," follows up on a 1972 report by the Surgeon General and reviews several hundred recent studies. It notes: "Both prime time and weekend children's television are dominated by action, power and danger. There is an average of five violent acts per hour on prime time and 18 acts per hour on children's weekend programs."

One research study cited in the report detected "unwarranted aggressive behavior in free play" by school children who are heavy viewers of violent TV shows. Another found that after watching violence on TV, teenage boys in London were more apt to engage in "serious violence" themselves. The new report found violent program content remains relatively constant despite continuing efforts by Congress and citizens' groups to combat it.

Opponents of TV violence continue their efforts. The National PTA this year named a screening team to review and recommend television shows for "family viewing" and for "viewing by families with mature teens." The PTA held six pilot workshops around the U.S. in the spring to help parents, teachers, and educators at the state level teach children to think critically about what they see on TV.

In recent Washington hearings by a House subcommittee on telecommunications, George Gerbner, dean of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications, said that violence on weekend daytime children's programs (long on cartoons) increased last year on all three major networks, from 17 violent acts per hour to 25--a contention rejected by network representatives. Such hearings have

continued so long that one observer told an Education Week reporter, "I feel like this is four years ago."

Peggy Charren, president of Action for Children's Television, a citizen's group, said at recent Federal Communications Commission hearings that market forces will never produce a quality children's programming because there's no profit for producers and advertisers in catering to people with no independent buying power. ACT is currently mounting a grass-roots campaign to help citizens press for more and better children's TV.

The National Education Association in May gave awards to eleven TV productions and a radio series (NPR's Children's Radio Theatre) for helping to advance learning.

[This article is reprinted from SLATE (Support for the Learning and Teaching of English), Vol. 7, #4, July 1982.]

Sit Back and Tune In!

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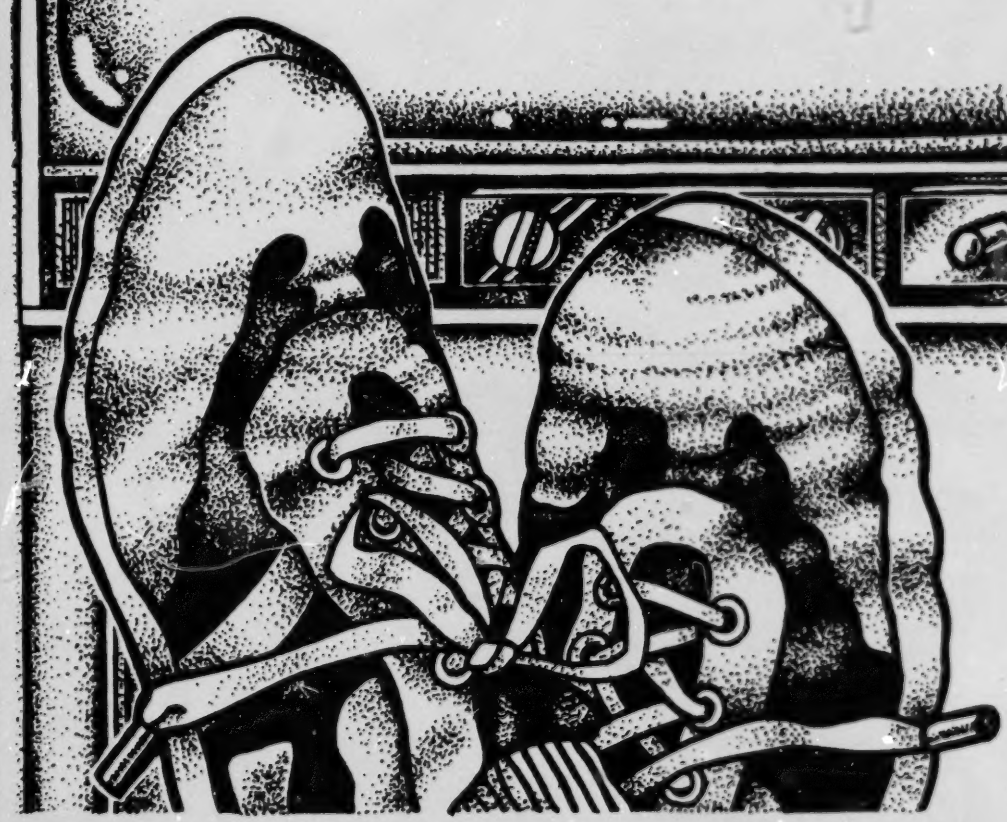

FOUR ARGUMENTS FOR THE TEACHING OF TELEVISION

ROBERT ROOT

We must teach television in our secondary classrooms. Despite continued complaints about its ethics and aesthetics, its effects on morality, politics, and literacy, television is unlikely to change its methods of operation and conform to the standards of its critics. But, although we may be unable at the moment to eliminate or even amend television, we are nonetheless able to educate our students about its effects and about the means by which they can mediate its effects upon them. To understand how to do that, we ought to understand four arguments for the teaching of television.

1) We ought to teach television because it's pervasive. The percentage of American families who don't own a television set is relatively small. For a large number of those who do, television is the major--and sometimes only--medium for entertainment and information and the number of hours those sets are on during an average day is high. With the recent rapid expansion of cable television systems and the equally rapid escalation of ticket prices for events ranging from concerts and theatre to sports, television is likely to extend its presence even farther. By offering films, sporting events, drama, classical music, theatre, news, and advertising, its programming provides our students with a majority of their examples of narrative, drama, exposition, and argumentation. To ignore that pervasive element of their lives and teach only materials the student finds principally in the classroom is to unnecessarily divorce the learning experience from the living experience.

2) We ought to teach television because it's influential. Younger viewers continually discover both the real and fictional characters of television among their prospective role models, and they glean much of their understanding of social issues and personal relationships from the handling of them on television. When they address issues and relationships, they are often likely to do it in terms of the images they carry with them from their viewing. Moreover, the subliminal level of television makes it unnecessary to consciously consider a program's message or presentation in order to absorb it;

it insinuates itself unbidden into our subconscious, as with the advertising jingles we unknowingly memorize. Such implicit messages of programming may be different from the explicit messages. To leave students to face both explicit and implicit influences of television without the means to understand and counteract them is to leave them unprotected and the influences upon them unchecked.

3) We ought to teach television because it affects learning. No evidence exists that television harms a viewer's ability to achieve literacy, but Gavriel Salomon has pointed out (1981) that literacy is not merely a set of acquired skills but also the habit of using them. He argues that television does not limit a child's ability to generate images; it simply "habituates him to being image-lazy." Because television does not require elaboration on the part of the viewer, it habituates him to seek material which doesn't require elaboration--where one might read a book to discover an experience, television makes the viewer accustomed to experiences which can be almost totally anticipated. But Salomon has also stressed that, while television doesn't help develop cognitive skills, it could--the same thinking skills that advance literacy in reading could be acquired through television. To ignore the tendency of television to make viewers image-lazy and passive is to ignore a central problem in developing the student's cognitive skills and to allow a significant influence on the student's processing of ideas to continue unchecked.

4) We ought to teach television because it's an important resource. All of the arguments above point to television's value as a resource across the curriculum. Television does more than narrate stories or dramatize events; it reports on and analyzes science, the arts, past and current history, public affairs, economics, social issues, and athletics--the full range of public instruction. Its potential influence offers us appropriate issues to raise in instruction across the curriculum--programs like Nova keep us more up-to-date in science than textbooks possibly can; news broadcasts and special reports sensitize us to current issues; the whole gamut of literary and rhetorical presentation is run in any given week. Because it's pervasive, because it's influential, because it affects learning, television is an important resource, one which is readily available.

By advocating the teaching of television in the classroom, I'm not suggesting the removal of traditional subjects and replacement with instruction about television, although in some cases that might be an improvement. However, I believe strongly that teachers, by ignoring popular culture, squander a valuable resource that could help students see connections with traditional subjects; they also alienate students by creating an unnecessary adversary relationship between different facets of culture which may be complementary rather than conflicting. Incorporating popular culture into existing courses across the disciplines could not only help students better handle its influences but also provide an important context for the subjects we regularly teach. Thus, in addition to the print materials usually taught in such units, I would include analyses of newscasts in units on language, examination of television series in units on narrative conventions, and discussion of documentaries and commercials in units on critical thinking and rhetoric. In such an integrated fashion, the English course could foster the traditional skills of the student while mitigating the student's ability to be influenced by television.

To give an example which will illustrate the ways television might promote language skills, let me explain an assignment in which a class (or combination of classes) would write and publish a booklet called What's On Tonight? The Student Guide to Current Television.

Rationale: In this assignment, television is a means of helping the students explore a subject, abstract meaning from the several experiences the assignment requires, and synthesize the information they have abstracted. By making the students abstract, classify, synthesize, and define, the assignment attempts to make them active, thoughtful viewers who are able to consciously process the experience rather than passively accept it. It also makes students more aware of the kinds of programming television offers and the ways they function. While the assignment thus provides various ways of mitigating the influence of television, it fosters, at the same time, the skills of critical thinking, group interaction, researching and drafting a composition, and speaking and writing for specific occasions and audiences by creating a genuine writing experience from inception to publication and monitoring the student's progress throughout the experience.

Assignment: The class will research, write, and publish a consumer's guide to current television programming. The object of the guide will be to inform fellow students and the general public about the nature of as many current television series as possible, giving an accurate and reliable description of each show and an assessment of its prospective audience. To complete the assignment these steps should be followed:

1) The class first devises a questionnaire to fill out which would gain the essential concrete information about each series (regular performers and their roles, network and production company, time slot and day, etc.) and guide the writing of both a description of the series' premise and a typical episode. There would also be room for personal opinion about the series as long as it is opinion which provides evidence and illustration from episodes the reporter has watched. The class should decide for whom to write and publish the report.

2) Each class member then selects and/or is assigned a show to review. At the beginning of the school year the class might confine itself to new series; multiple sections might collaborate on the whole spectrum of programming or each take a network or a channel or a genre. Whatever the format, each student would be required to watch between three and six episodes, describe the series in terms of the format devised for the publication, and react critically to the experience of viewing and reviewing.

3) If the class is divided into groups, each exploring a different sub-genre (family shows, comedies, police, etc.), individual reporters can more readily compare reports to make certain the format works and the descriptions answer the requirements of the assignment. Group sessions can also help with the prewriting and revising of individual reports. If necessary, small groups should provide introductions to sub-sections of the consumer's guide and the whole class should contribute to the prewriting and revising of the introduction to the entire publication. (An intrepid teacher would submit a draft of the introduction to the class to model his or her own writing for them.)

4) The class as a whole is responsible for final copy including

proofreading, copyreading, graphics, design, title page and table of contents, and sales and promotion.

This kind of assignment is limited in its adaptability only by the limits of a teacher's imagination and could serve equally well as the format for exploring entirely different subjects. The point is that it illustrates a way in which the English teacher's primary goal of teaching language arts can be integrated with an assignment which fosters command of television as well. A multitude of other ways exist for integrating the teaching of television into the English classroom, many of them less grand in scale. We need to be open to their use, simply because we must teach television in the secondary school.

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TELEVISION: REPERCUSSIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

ELIZABETH JAMES

Television is a firmly established, well-accepted part of our lives. More American homes today have television sets than have indoor plumbing. As a result, even preschool children are watching a great deal of television. It is estimated that children in the first and second grades watch an average of 15 to 16 hours weekly, with viewing increasing steadily until by the fifth and sixth grades children are watching about 25 hours weekly. The average high school graduate has spent up to 22,000 hours in front of the television, as opposed to 11,000 hours in the classroom (Fiske 1980). Other than parental influence, television may have more impact on children than any single force in our society. A great deal of research has been done exploring the general effects of television viewing, but the ways in which television influences how children learn and their acquisition of specific skills is a new area of study which needs to be examined in depth. As an elementary teacher with a language arts background, I am concerned with several related issues. How is television affecting the way children learn? What is the effect of television upon children's language arts skills? How can teachers best utilize what is being learned about children and television in the classroom?

There is little question that children learn a great deal from television. The television-viewing child has a far more sophisticated knowledge of the outside world than did children of the pre-television era. Children can acquire and retain information and learn concepts and skills from watching television, but this is highly dependent upon the content and quality of the television program (Sunderlin 1967). Regardless of the program content, there are some fundamental differences between the way that children learn from television and the way in which they learn at school.

Television is primarily narrative, focusing on the concrete images it presents to the viewer. The school curriculum is based upon language, and tends to be abstract and conceptual. The approach to learning in school is essentially cognitive, while learning from

television involves a more immediate, emotional response. Thus, learning from school and learning from television have very different results. Neil Postman writes in Phi Delta Kappan, "We can expect very few connections between the imagery of television and the world of ideas and issues." (Postman 1979).

Emphasis on instant gratification is one of television's most powerful characteristics. Information learned from television encompasses immediate comprehension and emotional satisfaction for the viewer. In contrast, school is structured so that the concepts and ideas learned are hierarchal, and the student feels that there is always more to learn. Intellectual and emotional gratification is often postponed (Postman 1979). Many educators find that children today exhibit a low tolerance for the frustration of learning (Waters 1977). Elementary-aged children have had years to become accustomed to the characteristics of television and are used to having all problems resolved in the time span of a television program. If television has altered children's attitudes and approaches to learning, how has it also affected the acquisition of specific skills?

Considerable research has been done in recent years on the effects of television on children's achievement in reading. Television viewing in the primary grades has been shown to enrich children's vocabulary (Busch 1978, Moldenhauer and Miller 1980). It is not clear, however, if television viewing has had a positive overall effect upon the reading skills of primary children. Teachers and librarians report that the television-viewing children of today are less patient in learning to read than were their non-viewing predecessors (Waters 1977, Busch 1978). Parental influences seem particularly significant in the relationship between television viewing and reading. One study showed that 69% of the students with high reading abilities reported that their parents seldom watched television, encouraged the children to be selective in the programs which they watched, and praised the children when they read (Busch 1978).

Studies conducted with adolescents and teen-agers generally indicate a negative correlation between television viewing and the amount of reading they do (Moldenhauer and Miller 1980). This is particularly true of students with low reading abilities, who become

frustrated by reading and turn to television as a principal means of entertainment and information gathering (Busch 1978). There is little evidence of a significant relationship between the amount of television viewed and reading achievement. Nor is there evidence that good readers view more or less television than poor readers. Bright students do seem to reach a saturation level of viewing at which their attention begins to expand in other directions (Moldenhauer and Miller 1980). A study conducted in El Salvador found that there was "no evidence of a TV exposure effect in a specific subject achievement . . . (but) a striking negative association of television exposure with long term reading skills growth." (Moldenhauer and Miller 1980). Because of the negative correlation between TV viewing and reading in later years and the indication that television may inhibit long term reading growth, adolescence may be a particularly important time for parents and teachers to try to discourage students from excessive television viewing.

The results of research on the relationship of television viewing and listening skills are mixed. Research indicates that one important listening skill is the ability to know when and how to request additional information from the speaker (Patterson 1979), and television viewing does not develop this skill. Studies on guided television viewing have found that listening skills are enhanced by guided viewing (Mangieri 1979). Training for auditory sequential memory appears to improve listening skills, but does not correlate with improvement in other areas of the language arts such as reading (Klein 1979). Thus auditory training may aid the television viewer's listening skills yet not carry over into increased abilities in other areas of language arts. Whether television viewing is helpful or harmful in developing listening skills needs to be examined further.

There is very little research to date studying the effects of television on children's speaking and writing skills. Although television viewing results in richer vocabularies for children, research doesn't indicate that they have acquired more than a superficial comprehension of what the words mean (Waters 1977). It is not clear if children are able to use these new words effectively in their speaking and writing. The research finding that more and more children are

turning away from the printed word and looking to television to find answers to their questions (Busch 1978) may also be evidence that children are less likely to value writing as an important skill to be learned. Future research needs to address this question.

There is a great deal of evidence indicating that adults--particularly parents--play an important role in determining the effects of television on children. If adults "take the time to view and discuss programs with children, make their beliefs and attitudes clear in words and deeds, and maintain healthy emotional relationships with children, any disturbing or damaging effects of television on children are likely to be minimized." (Sunderlin 1967). Television has been used effectively to stimulate communication between parents and their children when it is used as a topic for discussions of moral issues (Gray 1980). Television can also provide a shared symbolic structure for children, thus facilitating interpersonal communication (Noral 1980), but they often have many misconceptions about what they view on television. Even adults grant TV high credibility, so it is understandable that to children "seeing is believing." The children most likely to be influenced by the stereotypes and prejudices viewed on television are those whose parents do not view and discuss programs with them (Sunderlin 1967).

Many educators now feel that helping children to become thoughtful, critical consumers of television is one of the responsibilities of the contemporary school. The need for this is clearly evidenced by some of the following statistics from a 1977 survey conducted by the Roper Organization:

> 64% of the American people get most of their news from television; the percentage among younger Americans is much higher.
>
> The public considers television the most believable communications medium by a 2½ to 1 advantage over its closest competitor, the newspaper.
>
> 75% of the American people receive most of their information about political candidates in national elections from television. (Schorr 1978)

Concerned teachers are trying to develop comprehensive television education programs as a part of their language arts curriculum to help children learn to select, analyze, and evaluate the television they view.

Many of the programs designed to help students develop their television literacy are intended to stimulate reading as well. TV tie-ins have proven very popular with low-ability students who find the familiarity, simple plot structure, and limited vocabulary helpful. Television script-reading has also become popular. Available through the television networks, script-reading has met with success (LeGrand-Brodsky 1979). Its goal is to motivate students to read the television script, capitalizing on the interest already generated by the television show. Other programs are available which teach specific reading skills through a series of activities which children could complete while watching any television program. One excellent source is "Using Television to Teach Specific Reading Skills," (Adams and Harrison 1975).

Prime Time School Television is a television literacy program designed to be used with specific popular television shows. It is a series of curriculum units based on subjects such as "Television, Police, and the Law" or "Television and Economics." PTST has been highly motivational for students, but the risk in using these study guides is "that teachers may have to endorse the very kind of violent or mindless programs they would otherwise deplore." (Pines 1979).

> Teachers can help prepare students to cope with television:
>
> by familiarizing them with the symbols, grammar, and techniques of visual communication; by helping them understand the nature of television, the medium, and the industry; by helping them develop critical viewing skills; and finally, by suggesting ways to take action against television when they think it necessary. (Schorr 1978)

This can involve analyzing programs over a period of time, visiting a television station, writing letters criticizing or praising either programs or commercials, posting lists of recommended children's programs, videotaping by the students themselves, having students participate in writing and broadcasting their own news shows, and teaching children to critically evaluate television commercials. Higher level thinking processes can be taught in the content areas in programs such as "Thinkabout," designed by the Agency for Instructional Television. All of these activities can be helpful in teaching children that television has the power to "inform, entertain, persuade, and propagandize." (Pomainville 1981).

Television is shaping the thoughts, behaviors, and ideas of our children. Research indicates that the impact of television upon children's lives may be far greater than most adults realize. Children are spending an overwhelming amount of time viewing television, and they need to develop critical television viewing skills to process this tremendous amount of input. As parents and educators we are directly responsible for helping our children become careful consumers of television. This goal can be achieved both through the school and at home by teaching children to be selective, thoughtful, critical viewers of television.

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Elizabeth James is presently teaching second grade in Howell, MI. In her fifth year of teaching at the primary level, she especially enjoys incorporating language arts into the classroom. Beth has her Master's degree in language arts and plans to pursue a career in writing in the future. A proponent of animal rights, she has two cats, helps to care for a flock of ducks and geese each winter, and has found homes for many "orphan" dogs and cats.

CHANNELING TELEVISION TOWARD CRITICAL THINKING

LOREN C. THOMPSON and ALAN FRAGER

It is vital that today's students be painstakingly guided toward acquisition of an ever more sophisticated ability to accurately analyze and evaluate the vast and complex flood of incoming communication with which they are constantly faced. Hand in hand with such ability goes the need to develop corollary skills such as understanding one's own thought processes and the role of language structure and usage in their development and evolving composition.

Upon these cornerstone premises rests the primary justification for expanded instruction of critical thinking skills as an important domain in English education. Past efforts in this area, when seriously undertaken at all, have ridden almost exclusively aback literature instruction by concentrating student focus upon such skills as analyzing situations from differing points of view, examining propaganda, and identifying varying author, character, or societal values.

Since such efforts to encourage a critical attitude and capacity in students almost exclusively employed printed language, the return on such efforts was necessarily diminished because many students couldn't or wouldn't read the printed passages teachers assigned. This proved a major obstacle, for without a common source to explicate and discuss, critical thinking instruction may have been somewhat less than optimally effective.

We feel that contemporary teachers, with the aid of burgeoning technology, may easily broaden the scope of their approaches to critical thinking instruction by making use of various media. Television is just such an instructional resource. Recent research findings point inevitably toward such a conclusion.

Television today directly reaches at least 97% of American homes (Bell, 1975) and the average high school student will have spent some 22,000 viewing hours by graduation, including as many as 350,000 commercial messages (Liebert, 1976). If one compares this to the number of hours the average graduate has spent reading, the impact is startling.

Although perceived by many educators as a negative influence, television may prove to be just the opposite if thoughtfully and strategically employed. A recent ten-year investigation, for instance, concerning the impact of television on children and their reading concluded that many found it very helpful with school work (Witty, 1967), and Lamb (1967) goes so far as to state, "Children can learn much from television which will make it possible for them to benefit by responding to print more efficiently and with greater understanding." Cook (1973), after investigating the effectiveness of specific lessons geared to advancing awareness of propaganda techniques employed by advertisers on television, concluded that students readily learn to recognize such tactics and transfer this learning to the recognition of propaganda in print. Further, Hamilton's 1975 study concluded that TV tie-in books are often effective motivators of reading "regardless of the reading abilities of students."

Today's teacher, then, faces a class which possesses an extensive, vivid and ready base upon which to develop critical thinking skills. The next question is how to proceed in such a manner as to effectively utilize this quasi-dormant resource.

We confronted just such a query in the spring of 1981 while preparing working papers for a TV-oriented graduate/undergraduate course to be piloted during the upcoming summer session. The approach we chose to implement was that of teacher-prepared lessons emphasizing critical thinking skills applied initially to television viewing and then transferred to print counterparts.

One of our model lessons dealt with stereotyping, the mental process of lumping together members of a group and associating them with particular traits. Closely related to categorizing, whereby labels or categories are used to group objects and events under general headings in an effort to simplify a complex world, stereotyping is often mistaken as the same. In reality it is quite different in that unproven or untrue universal assertions often become widely accepted without having been carefully thought out. Such acceptance often arises from popular repetition and may reside primarily on a relatively unconscious level. Due to the general pervasiveness of stereotyping throughout society, its widespread use in both print and

television is easily demonstrable. Since both media are only reflections of human perceptions, or misperceptions, students can be led to a deeper awareness of their own unconscious thought processes. Such learning is of both immediate and lasting value.

The initial section of our demonstration lesson is designed to quickly involve and interest students. A brief segment (approximately ten minutes) is shown from Thurber's "The Male Animal," a televised production rich in contrasting stereotypical characters. Prior instructions have directed students to keep a careful eye on the characters, but no clue is given concerning the actual nature of what will be discussed.

When viewing is completed, the instructor, using an overhead projector or chalkboard, elicits group reactions to what was seen. ("The Male Animal" depicts athletes, for example, as essentially lacking in social grace or sophistication, slow-witted, interested only in sports or women, and completely oriented toward physical action; teachers are seen as lackluster, absent-minded, glasses-wearing and drolly-dressed.) Responses are immediate, usually animated, and not restricted to the "better" students.

When the listing is completed, the class is asked for a word that is generally used to describe such rigid character description. If someone knows "stereotyping," good; if not, it should be supplied.

This general session is followed by the formation of small groups consisting of three or four students. Each group is given copies of a brief reading selection -- one-fourth to one page -- which is to be read individually. (We use excerpts from such sources as: Time, 1941, which depicts Japanese as having "dogmatic and arrogant" expressions, wearing "hornrimmed spectacles," and "laughing loudly at the wrong times"; a current elementary school reader which abounds in statements containing sex stereotypes, such as "Sam led, and Helen went after him. Helen held his hand in a hard grip. She was timid in the darkness"; and Uncle Tom's Cabin, which characterized Blacks as having "a character essentially unlike the hard and dominant Anglo-Saxon race . . ."

Time (about twenty minutes) is then allotted to 1) identify any stereotypes within the passages; and 2) discuss their possible origins

and uses. Each group then presents the first part (identification) to the reassembled class. Discussion of the second aspect (origin and usage) will follow with the instructor assuming a role of moderator/facilitator, and recording responses on the overhead or board. This discussion should be encouraged to broaden along lines of student interest and might well include listing stereotypes of which they are personally aware.

Study is continued by assigning all to locate stereotypes on television or in print that night and bring them for class exposition the following day. Further, both teacher and students agree to begin watching for and sharing with the class any use of stereotyping they may detect in class-related reading or viewing from this time forward. Such activity will reinforce the growth of a critical attitude of mind in students and serve as a springboard to development of other important critical thinking skills.

It is our feeling that critical thinking skills can be successfully taught via teaching strategies that are willing to utilize individual student perceptions and prior knowledge, cooperative effort, and real-world based information of long-term value. Television, coupled with print counterparts, constitutes a very effective staging area for such endeavors.

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LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION:
PHOTOGRAPHIC TECHNIQUES APPLIED TO PROSE NARRATIVE

JEAN B. BRIDGES

"Once a new technology comes into a social milieu it cannot cease to permeate that milieu until every institution is saturated,"[1] states Marshall McLuhan, a spokesman for the electronic age. The result of the technology of television he calls a "sensuous revolution."[2] "Every enterprise, from Madison Avenue and General Motors to Hollywood and General Foods, has been shaken thoroughly and forced to seek new strategies of action."[3] Writers of the print media, recognizing the sensory mandate of the television image, appear to be no exception in the search for "new strategies." An adaptation of film techniques may be one of those new strategies used by today's writers of narrative prose, whether by deliberate choice or because of the saturation of the technology.

The reader discovers a surprising similarity between some current prose narratives and the video part of a television script, which concentrates on camera shots such as "long shot," a full view of a scene; "medium shot," a nearer view; and "close-up," a detailed view. The author/narrator, like the camera operator, controls the "dolly" (the platform on which the camera moves) to produce visually organized prose. Two recent best-sellers seem to use such photographic strategy: How the Good Guys Finally Won and I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.

Jimmy Breslin, author of How the Good Guys Finally Won, manipulates the camera as Tip O'Neill, his main "good guy," manipulates the mirrors and blue smoke (metaphors for power in the book). The narrator/journalist presents his version of that impeachment summer in 1974 like a documentary supported by "film clips" of incidents and a few "still shots."

In the opening pages of this Watergate story, Breslin rapidly moves the scene from the witness room to the hallway jammed with reporters to the courtroom, using a wide angle lens. He shows the "windowless courtroom" where five men await the verdict. He zeroes in with a close-up to John Mitchell's face when the verdict is read. "Mitchell's face had little flecks of white paste showing in the gray. He flinched, just slightly but enough to show it to you, as the

guilty-guilty-guilty hit him in the face. He looked like a man who was starting to drown but was embarrassed by it and did not want anybody to think he needed assistance."[4]

After this incident, the narrator begins his account with a brief episode in Speaker Carl Albert's office where Tip O'Neill, Majority Leader of the House of Representatives, speaks prophetically: "The time is going to come when impeachment is going to hit this Congress and we better be ready for it."[5] This "film clip" is only one of many which will demonstrate the rise of O'Neill to hero status.

Other "film clips" focused on O'Neill include the episode when John Kennedy arrives for the benefit breakfast and pockets the cash as he instructs O'Neill to give the checks to Kenny O'Donnell. O'Neill's education has truly begun. A few pages later, the camera zooms in on O'Neill in his office watching the evening news on television. The narration demonstrates his insight into the situation. When Agnew requested a House investigation into his financial situation, Breslin shows the determination of O'Neill for justice in this detailed incident. In the scene in the Oval Office where Nixon, Kissinger, and O'Neill met to discuss the Arab-Israeli war, the camera moves in to show the idiotic behavior of the President and then zooms to the note written by O'Neill: "President is acting very strangely."[6] Breslin reinforces O'Neill's observation with a "still" of Nixon alone in a small sitting room off the main office--the Oval Office: Nixon is eating cottage cheese and an apple, the same lunch he had every day. In another episode Breslin focuses on the Nixon diary which details his every move, including the fact that he spent usually no more than a half hour with his wife. O'Neill appears to be right: the President acts quite strangely in this obsession with his greatness--with Kissinger and Pat Nixon.

Intuitive, determined, informed--Breslin's hero is also human. In one incident, when he learns that he has become the new Majority Leader, O'Neill and Leo Diehl leave the airport singing. He sings to his wife on their thirty-third wedding anniversary. In the final scene of the book, Tip and Leo leave singing as the camera moves away and fades the scene, justice having been accomplished. His humor is seen when Ford and he go to the golf tournament and have their picture

made together; his conversation with the taxi driver enroute to the speech in Wyoming is an example of his courteous and warm relationship with people in general. Also, Breslin's close-ups of Tip with his Daniel Webster cigar point to the humanity of the powerful man who worked within the political system to bring justice.

The climax of Breslin's documentary occurs in the courtroom, the place where it began. With camera focused on Warren Burger as he reads the verdict--Nixon must turn over the sixty-four tapes, Breslin then moves the camera away for a "long shot" as Jaworski walks down the steps of the Supreme Court toward the television cameras to tell the United States about the historic decision. The date was July 24; on August 9 Nixon would officially resign.

As the reader closes the pages of How the Good Guys Finally Won, he realizes that the vitality of this New Journalism prose is evidenced by these detailed and dramatic incidents which usually involve the main character. The book rings with the echo of the Western in which the "good guy" always wins. Even in one "close-up" Breslin shows Charles Alan Wright looking like John Wayne. The author certainly seems aware of the visual media in this description; his inclusion of television cameramen within the framework of the narrative confirms such awareness.

The second selection for observation, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, the autobiography of Maya Angelou, a black female novelist, has two narrators subtly woven together: Maya, the woman looking into the past and Maya, the child experiencing the first sixteen years of her life. In carefully selected and detailed incidents, Angelou makes her early life a sensory experience for the reader, capitalizing like Breslin on photographic strategy. Her incidents, however, are more than "film clips"; instead they are similar to episodes in a series like "The Waltons."

The television format of "The Waltons" has the adult narrator introducing the episode followed by the episode itself, and a final comment by the narrator. In the book's introduction, Angelou, the adult voice, speaks: "I hadn't so much forgot as I couldn't bring myself to remember. Other things were more important."[7] The camera focuses on a scene at the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church where

Maya is sitting in the children's section in her lavender taffeta dress cut down from a white woman's throwaway. Here, the child Maya rushes from the building to go to the toilet, wetting her pants in the process. At the close of the humiliating but humorous incident, the voice of Maya, the adult, is heard: "If growing up is painful for the Southern Black, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens her throat."[8] This last statement is the book's thesis.

Many of the subsequent episodes which develop this thesis have the adult voice as the lead-in. Always the statements are general; the episodes are the specifics. One example is chapter 16. Maya, the adult, introduces the detailed incident: "During my tenth year, a white woman's kitchen became my finishing school."[9] The white woman, Viola Cullinan, kept up the old Southern tradition, drank alcohol, lived a regimented life, and called the child Mary. Miss Glory, the Negro maid who worked for Mrs. Cullinan, taught Maya-Mary-Margaret (her real name) about setting the table and explained the other ways of the white folks. Maya's dishes from which she ate were kept separate with Miss Glory's. Disenchanted, Maya was saved from future misery when she dropped the serving tray, the casserole, and two green glass cups. This detailed experience ends when the adult narrator says, "Mrs. Cullinan was right about one thing. My name wasn't Mary."[10]

Each of these fully developed incidents is seen like "long shots" or "medium shots," focusing on Momma's store, the revival meeting, the apartment in Los Angeles, the house in St. Louis, the school in Stamps, and other environments in which Maya found herself. Within the incidents are "close-ups": Momma on her knees, Maya in the lap of Mr. Freeman, Reverend Thompson's teeth "jumping out" of his mouth, Maya on the witness stand, the first sight of her father, Bailey, in church saying "Preach it!" These incidents, arranged in chronological order, diminish in length and detail as the book nears its end, however.

The final pages of the book would be filmed as a panorama (the television script would have the word pan, meaning a slow horizontal movement). Maya receives her diploma from Mission High School, writes her parents a letter telling them of her pregnancy, undergoes questioning about the father, goes to the doctor, buys baby clothes,

delivers the baby, carries the boy home, and sits looking at him for hours--all of these actions occur in three pages. However, the camera moves in for a final close-up: Maya with the baby sleeping close by her side. This swift ending is not so satisfying to the readers who enjoyed the sensual stimulation of the fully developed incidents.

According to McLuhan and Fiore: "Our time is a time for crossing barriers, for erasing old categories--for probing around. When two seemingly disparate elements are imaginatively poised, put in apposition in new and unique ways, startling discoveries often result."[11] This paper has shown how photographic principles have been superimposed upon two contemporary prose narratives. Viewing these analyses, the reader cannot know for sure that these writers--Breslin and Angelou--have deliberately incorporated "film strategies" into their organizations, but the possibility remains interesting.

Footnotes

[1]Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media (New York: Signet Books, 1964), p. 161.

[2]Ibid., p. 280.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Jimmy Breslin, How the Good Guys Finally Won (New York: Ballentine Books, 1975), p. 5.

[5]Ibid., p. 11.

[6]Ibid., p. 64.

[7]Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), p. 1.

[8]Ibid., p. 3.

[9]Ibid., p. 88.

[10]Ibid., p. 93.

[11]Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, The Medium is the Message (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), p. 6.

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WATCHING HARLEQUIN ROMANCES/ READING "DUKES OF HAZZARD"

CLAUDIA MITCHELL

At a time when there is an increased emphasis in schools on television literacy and visual literacy, several anomalies about the more traditional forms of "text" literacy warrant examination: There are many more adults who can read compared to the number who actually do read; much of the voluntary reading of adults is limited to a specific type, namely fiction. In this paper I will examine those anomalies and give some consideration to the implications for training in visual literacy. My purpose is to remind us that one major objective we need to have in teaching our students to read, or view, is to help them enrich their lives.

In a recent in-depth ethnographic study of voracious adult readers of fiction (Mitchell, 1981), it was observed that whereas we tend to laud the reading act in general, we tend to regard specific types of the reading act as socially useful: the reading of the serious novel, or the novel as art form, the reading of forms of non-fiction, the reading of some but not all newspapers, and the functional reading of contracts, insurance forms, and income tax manuals. The Mickey Spillane thriller, the nurse romance, the romantic best-seller, the "pot-boilers," and the gossip sheets tend to be accorded a much lower status except as data for sociological study. In short, while it is respectable to study about such texts, it is not respectable to be caught reading them. The marketability of such works, however, might be taken as an index of their popularity.

Not only are these latter works generally disparaged, they are also disparaged specifically by many of those who consume them. Such readers often apologized for what they read, commenting, "Oh, I just read fiction," (shrug), or in a more defensive tack noted, "Yes, I read fiction, but I learn a lot from it." There were a number of readers in the aforementioned study who had compulsions to read to the exclusion of doing school work, establishing social relationships, attending to families, or seeking gainful employment outside the home. While reading for them was a form of drug, their indulgences and

compulsions may have been harmless, at least compared to some other forms of dependency since their reading obviously filled some definite need in their lives. However, it is difficult to avoid certain educational implications. It would seem that there may be issues that are more basic than how to teach children to read, or how to make them into avid readers, since the profiles of some of the readers might bring into question the social, political, or intellectual desirability of quantities and certain qualities of reading.

Upon embarking upon a study of the voracious adult fiction reader, I encountered a somewhat standard response: "But...(smirk) what if you end up with nurse-story readers?" The implication was, "Yes, I know they exist--but don't you mean to study readers--real readers?" But, who are real readers? Had I said that I was about to embark upon a study of voracious television viewers, TV addicts, or boob-tube junkies, I suspect the response would have been a sigh and an acknowledgement on the part of my listener that I was about to tap consumers of that vast wasteland comprised of viewers of sit-coms, soap operas, and made-for-TV movies. Are these the real viewers? While I can only speculate at this juncture, it would seem that much of what we object to in the television wasteland syndrome is equally in evidence in the popular reading practices of many individuals. But, before disparaging either or both, let us consider the purpose they serve in the lives of their consumers.

What is interesting in any apparent similarities is that mass television viewing and mass book reading both satisfy the audience's need for story, the narrative. Evidence of this same need exists in the early history of man and in the continuing transmission of aspects of our culture through myths, legends, and fairy tales. Narratives seem to help us to order our world. There are examples of the story form in all cultures. Late twentieth century man, for the most, derives this order of the social world from the screen, but the fact that there is a strong market for fiction would indicate that there are those who still find pleasure in the print form.

I would like to qualify all of my remarks about television viewers or readers by noting that there are some who appear to need forms of story more than others. Moreover, there are not always parallels

between television viewing and book reading, any more than there are necessarily parallels between readers whose fancy is Suzanne Langer or James Joyce and those who crave Victoria Holt. However, I would like to make several suggestions with regard to literacy training in television or reading, and with regard to future explorations in this area.

First, in looking at the mass appeal of books or television, we are in part, looking at the phenomenon of entertainment. While there may be a desire to elevate the critical viewing/reading of audiences from Mickey Spillane or "Dukes of Hazzard" to Ernest Hemingway or "Masterpiece Theatre," let us not abandon the realization that there is a need for fantasy and escape with simple plot and character development in some lives. Television literacy units designed to raise the consciousness of television viewers by a critical study of advertising, or the sway of the news media, will not necessarily serve any different function than training critical readers of newspapers or other forms of written propaganda. In short, while it is important to have critical viewers of informative or educational television, as it is important to the well being of our citizenry that we produce literate consumers of print, such practices are not likely to replace the need for entertainment in our lives.

In entertainment, who needs what, how much, and why, are the issues of concern. Books and television, nurse romances or sit-coms are not substitutes for real life. An argument can be made for encouraging selective viewing or selective reading. But what is it about the lives of individuals that imposes the need for fantasy, escape, idling, or whatever it may be called. Before we talk about elevating, making more critical, or improving consumers, I will explore more fully such a question. As Mendelsohn and Spetnagel (1980) observe:

> Entertainment phenomena do not take place in vaccua; thus they are not likely to occur in laboratory-like situations where historical, aesthetic, and social influences are considered to be either inoperative or unimportant. Rather, entertainment occurs within a context of complex interactions that involve institutions, social norms, group behaviours, and traditions--all of which can be considered to comprise a sociological enterprise. (p. 131)

Recently I was involved in a workshop on television literacy where some very exciting suggestions were being made for developing teaching units for television. Television networks have responded to the issue by developing excellent study units to accompany their screenings of "Of Mice and Men," or adaptations of other fine literary works. Teachers have often rejoiced that students have moved from viewing a movie or a sit-com to reading the original novel, or the book version written after the appearance of the show. It has been argued that we are producing more mature viewers, more critical viewers and more demanding viewers, as well as consumers of print-media (alias books).

My concern in this paper has not been with whether we succeed or fail in producing more critical consumers of culture but with why people need entertainment, and how they fulfill that need. When it was revealed by the voracious adult readers in the study cited earlier that they attributed very little of their voracious reading habit to the school, and that, in fact, many of them read in spite of the school rather than because of anything that happened in the school. They also noted that the habit had been nurtured at home, where parents served as models, or where there was frequently a need for reading. A number of the readers were children with no brothers or sisters, loners, sickly, or transient individuals. Clearly there are exceptions. Interestingly, in schools we attempt to by-pass the use of books as friends and treat them as an object of study. Moreover, there has been a genuine effort to deal with the social aspects of children's development in school, and we regard it as important that they learn to interact with peers. We often regard it as a failure on our part if we cannot draw out the isolate. Perhaps, then, we have been relatively successful in training the non-voracious reader. Will we do the same thing with television viewing? Will we, through an analytical approach to "Of Mice and Men" do the same thing? That is, will we rule out another entertainment outlet? While many of my colleagues in education would rejoice, I submit that theirs is an attitude no different from that presented in Leavis' seminal work, Fiction and the Reading Public (1932), where she disparaged the effortless-cum-useless aspects of reading the popular novel over the

serious novel. Such an attitude is also not unlike that explored later by Wilson (1957) who describes aspects of fiction reading as, "a kind of vice, that for silliness and minor harmfulness ranks somewhere between smoking and crossword puzzles." (p. 152)

In closing I argue that while the goals of education in general must surely be to improve the lives of our students, or at least to help provide them with the tools to live as full a life as possible, the means of reaching that goal are not likely to include critical television viewing or critical reading unless we are also prepared to explore the use of various media in their lives. Adults who do not read may, in many cases, seek to fulfill their needs through television. If the need for fantasy, entertainment, or escape causes viewers to view what they view or causes readers to read what they read, then let us explore, not skirt, the reasons for that need.

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DOING IT ALL FOR YOU: TV ADS AND THEIR AUDIENCES

KENNETH JURKIEWICZ

"Nobody can do it like McDonald's can." It seems like that slogan and that jingle have been reverberating in our brainpans for several years now, but actually they were introduced to an unsuspecting America on May 7, 1979, which was really not that long ago.

I'm sure of that exact date because I heard the unctuous and patronizing announcer emphasize it on a paper-thin plastic "Soundsheet" recording which was recently given to me by a student in my Freshman Composition class. He was one of thousands of McDonald's employees who received it along with their paychecks shortly before the new campaign was unleashed.

Hearing that "Soundsheet" in class made both teacher and students more aware of the crucial role of the audience in the communication process. The recording was pitched directly to each "crew member" working for McDonald's, spurring every employee on to greater efforts on behalf of the corporation. Yet the manner in which McDonald's chose to communicate to that primary audience told the astonished listeners in our class far more: how the company wanted to reach a much larger public--the various consumer groups that frequent fast food franchises most often.

Other than the employee pep talks, the record consisted of seven different versions of the new McDonald's jingle, each with different lyrics and orchestration, and each targeted to a different segment of the fragmented fast food market: a concert-hall piano solo that somehow evoked both classical and honky-tonk styles; a bouncy sing-along variation; a march; a disco arrangement; a soulful rhythm-and-blues rendition; a children's chorus singing along with all the McDonaldland characters; and a big band version with a Sinatra sound-alike doing the vocals. With the exception of a hard rock interpretation, which would probably be considered too stridently threatening for the kind of image that the corporation wanted to maintain, the only other significant popular musical style not represented on this recording was the country and western sound. We should recall, though, that the "Soundsheet" and the ad campaign were

prepared and released in early 1979, when disco was still dominant and before the onslaught of the "urban cowboy" scene (C & W fans were more than amply appealed to in the next wave of McDonald's breakfast time commercials). The students in my class were intrigued at how expansive this campaign proved to be, especially after hearing the different lavishly-produced versions back to back.

Making students aware of how audiences are appealed to is obviously important to their development as communicators as well as consumers of both messages and products. We need to help students critically examine the ways in which the tastes, values, fears, and attitudes of various consumer groups are expressed, manipulated, or exploited in commercials. The following activities should provide thought-provoking discussions and challenging writing tasks for students who don't want to take their television viewing habits for granted:

1. Have students keep a descriptive log of TV commercials over an extended period of time and at different points of the broadcasting day. Have them pay particular attention in each case to the visual and oral cues that would connect the message of the ad to its intended audience. How are the people in the commercial dressed? What are they doing in the ad? In what settings have they been placed? What sort of music provides the accompaniment for their activities? In what tone does the announcer address the viewers and/or the actors? What level of vocabulary is spoken in the ad? How subtle or blatant is the advertising pitch? How have all these elements been orchestrated to reach a targeted group of consumers? What time of day is this particular ad broadcast? What kinds of products does one generally find sponsoring different types of programs? Why, for example, are there so many home remedies and patent medicines advertised on the network nightly news? What sorts of changes in the content of ads for the same product can be found at different parts of the day on various kinds of programs?

2. Have students prepare a 30- or 60-second commercial for a product or corporation of their choice. Have them provide a very specific rationale for each aspect of their ad in terms of appealing to a targeted audience. After they have completed their project, have

them revise it to fit the needs of a distinctly different audience. What sorts of changes have to be made in the overall approach of the commercial in order to reach that different group?

3. Recall for your students that there have been times when entirely new audiences have been created by advertising agencies for products that had never been used by that portion of the consumer public--e.g., men's toiletries, "light" beer, etc. Have students design strategies for coordinating ad campaigns that would promote products for groups that never had any real contact with them--e.g., make-up for men, classical music, opera or ballet for rock-oriented young people, T-shirts and jeans for the elderly, etc.

Such exercises in the classroom at any level of education can be insightful and entertaining for all kinds of reasons, not the least of which is the disgruntling reminder of how accurately some ads reach our own individual psyches. As Jonathan Price mordantly put it in his incisive exploration of the form, The Best Things on TV: Commercials (New York: Penguin, 1978),

> When you see a commercial you like, ask yourself, Am I part of the target audience for this product? Are they aiming at my age, my class, my psychological reasons for buying this kind of product? If you feel pinpointed, you may be caught in the cross hairs of calculation and research. (p. 76)

I am sure that we could all agree that we English teachers are probably the best qualified to instruct students on how to most adroitly sidestep those cross hairs, for their own benefit as well as society's.

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PROMISES PROMISES--AND DELIVERS

JACK MCGARVEY

As the film begins, a stream of water pours down from the top of the screen to fill a water glass in slow motion. A voice in the background--bland, standard American accent--intones some basic facts, "Water. You can drink it; you can bathe in it; you can use it to wash your clothes and flush your toilets."

Then, the scene shifts to the way a creator of a TV commercial would handle the subject. A beautiful woman, scantily clothed, appears lounging partly submerged in a pretty, fern-bedecked pool. She speaks huskily in a foreign accent, "Vater. So soothing to your skin; a natural emollient," she begins.

This brief amusing contrast appears near the beginning of Promises, a film that makes important points about television commercials. Here it presents a basic premise: Give information, and the viewer will examine it critically; create an emotional response, and the viewer is distracted and thus less critical. It is an auspicious beginning for a film that I've used successfully with groups from grade 6 through adults at graduate school level.

Narrated by actor Stacy Keach, the film rollicks along, poking fun at the techniques of persuasion that producers of TV commercials use. There is a segment showing how those "candid" man-in-the-street interviews are made. A young man is accosted by a film crew and asked to choose which banana he likes better. He doesn't like either one and stalks away. The point here is that the commercial shown on TV may have been only one of dozens filmed. Another segment shows the use of specious comparison. A man, wearing a construction helmet while he paints a wall, complains of an upset stomach. His ever-helpful wife, talking in that cloying tone that the TV housewife invariably affects, tells him that what he needs is a liquid antacid. She takes off his helmet, pours in paint and sloshes it around to coat the inside. The suggestion here is obvious: the liquid antacid will do the same for his stomach. It doesn't, of course, but it's an attractive idea, more or less.

Other segments present techniques such as fear tactics, claims that sound factual but aren't, and testimonials by authority figures and the famous. Promises also presents the human images that commercials portray. Single women appear primarily as love objects and as decoration; teenagers are most always blemish free, healthy, and so happy that it's nauseating; single men are also used as decorations and as distant macho sex objects; married life consists of a wife obsessed with keeping her house clean and her husband happy and her spouse is shown as fatherly and protective, and usually bumbling when it comes to anything domestic; and elderly people are usually shown as harmless fuddy-duddies in rarely useful roles.

Every time I show the film it provokes laughter, for the segments are filled with playfulness. But the laughter inevitably contains wry recognition, for the TV watcher always thinks about commercials currently being played.

Humor aside, however, Promises makes many serious and telling points about TV commercials. It also gives much useful information. The Federal Trade Commission is the agency that keeps a watchful eye on misleading TV ads. The film suggests steps the viewer can take if he or she thinks a commercial is unfair

One of the more interesting cases involving the FTC is a suit against American Home Products, the makers of Anacin, containing "the pain reliever doctors recommend most." The FTC thought that claim misleading, asserting the public had the right to know that the "pain reliever" is aspirin. The FTC won the first court case, but American Home Products is appealing it of course. Consumers who buy Anacin pay anywhere from 200 to 500% more for the same chemical compound contained in the generic label bottle. After all, someone has to pay for those TV ads.

One weakness that Promises may have is that it doesn't do much with the language used in TV advertising. It is with this language that I have the best times with my students. I give them such beauties as, "You can see how luxurious my hair feels," and turn them loose. Try untangling the syntax of that sentence.

I hope those reading this don't need any convincing to include a unit on TV commercials as part of the English language arts curriculum. But if they do need some persuasion, the children we teach--if they are average TV viewers--are exposed to twelve solid days of commercials in one year's time. That translates into almost the equivalent of a whole year's schooling for a student in grade ten.

But that's just another statistic and may not hold much meaning except that TV commercials are among the most powerful and cleverly conceived forms of communication ever devised. Don't believe me? Well, go to your laundry cabinet and check the label on your liquid laundry bleach. If it's Clorox, you've been persuaded to spend up to 54% more for sodium hypochlorite and water. That's what all liquid bleaches contain.

But before this starts sounding like a consumer education course, let me assure you that Promises is an excellent film that will start a process of analyzing language. I usually show it twice--the first time to laugh together; the second to take notes to use for research to identify the techniques used in current TV ads. Twice seen, Promises will likely make it impossible for you and your students to watch any TV commercial without skepticism, which is a good position to take on almost any use of persuasive language.

From what I know of TV ad writers, skeptical viewers don't bother them at all. They are after a response, even a negative one. You can't win, but using Promises will keep the battle on more even terms.

[Information on Promises--rental or purchase--may be obtained from Ramsgate Films, 704 Santa Monica Boulevard, Santa Monica, CA 90401 (213/394-8819). You might also check a regional or college film library; the film is growing in popularity.]

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TELEVISION STUDY IN THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM

KATHLEEN SCHOLL

"I'd like to deal with television in my classroom. I believe it is an important medium of communication in our culture and needs to be a part of our curriculum. But what do I teach and how do I go about it?"

The answer to that question, of course, depends partly on what the teacher is presently teaching: 6th graders, 10th graders, English literature, language arts, reading? The age and ability of the students, along with the course content can help furnish a framework within which television can be studied in a classroom: in the study of language, literary analysis, communication, writing, drama, folklore, criticism or dialect. Television can also be studied by and for itself. It may, however, be difficult in some situations to add a unit on television to a curriculum. Television material used with other units has the advantage of spreading the study throughout the year, reiterating key concepts, and allowing time for synthesis of material.

Language

Television offers the impact of the familiar through the language and psychological impact of commercials in studying about doublespeak, propaganda and persuasive language. A critical analysis of the language and emotion of commercials is less remote to students than the speeches of politicians or than a reasoned argument in print.

Literary Analysis

It has been suggested that television offers basic texts with which most of our students are familiar.[1] Moving back and forth between discussing characters on television shows and those in a short story may help students to generalize the meaning of that literary term and see its wide applicability. The same idea applies to plot, setting, theme, style (of director or writers), and genre (situation comedy, police show, western detective show, game show, sports, news, soap opera). (For a discussion of genre see Newcomb, 1974.)

Communication

Using a videotape camera can help students discover more about the medium, much as writing and producing print gives them new

information about reading. This provides a much needed new angle for teacher and students, on a medium that is too often one-way communication. Take a field trip to see a station at work in production. Discuss camera techniques such as pan, wipe, dissolve, close-up, medium and long shots (see Robinson, 1974 and Zettl, 1976). Analyze the syntax of a commercial or a news item: What was included, why, and in what order?

Writing

Have students react to television likes and dislikes by writing to the local television stations or to the various networks. They can also write to the Federal Communications Commission or to consumer groups such as Action for Children's Television or the National Citizen's Committee for Broadcasting with their concerns. Your class can write its own scripts for a TV show you like, or write a whole new production. Send your scripts off (see The Writer's Market for other suggestions) or produce them yourself, videotaping your own productions with the class that composed them or with a drama class.

Folklore

Why search only for written or oral examples in teaching a unit on folklore? Be an explorer--find electronic examples. Folklore is far from a quaint, "dead" subject. It is an ongoing process of passing on the wisdom of a particular group to its members. Look for folklore in programs. Ask television studio personnel about folklore they use (unauthored helpful or funny bits of information that help them cope with their jobs). Be patient. Your informant may not have thought of these as folklore. (An example of the folklore of teachers is the "Don't smile before Christmas" advice given to new teachers.)

Criticism

Have students write columns for your school paper criticizing television shows, commercials, and/or public announcement spots. Give awards to the best and worst of these shows and commercials. Run a filler for the school paper called "Did you know that..." with short pieces of information on all facets of television. Solicit student mail for suggestions of shows to be critiqued.

Dialects

Although television dialects are often stereotypic rather than authentic, the writer of the show is trying to suggest some things about characters in using dialects. What is being suggested to viewers? Is it appropriate? Find examples of different dialects on the "Today" show, on drama series, on sports shows.

Begin adding television study in your classroom by taking one of these ideas and incorporating it into a unit you already teach. Are you teaching the form of a business letter? The business letter form and editing techniques can be acquired in the natural, authentic atmosphere of writing real letters as suggested under Writing above. This project can be slowly expanded, perhaps by asking students to bring in interesting material on television to be kept in a TV file or box. Keep a "TV Board" for material that will elicit student response about television--anger, humor, annoyance, pleasure.

When you talk about television, try to have tapes of appropriate shows to play for your students. Video has tremendous impact. If your school does not have equipment, bring in a portable TV from home when you can use material airing at that time of day. Above all, use this important medium of communication to help students enjoy and comprehend traditional English curriculum and gain new insights into their familiar electronic medium.

Addresses

Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Action for Children's Television
46 Austin Street
Newtonville, MA 02160

National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting
1028 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

Footnote

[1]David Thorburn, Workshop, National Council of Teachers of English, Boston, November 23, 1981.

References

Newcomb, Horace. TV: The Most Popular Art. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974.

Robinson, Richard. The Video Primer. New York: Links Books, 1974.

Zettl, Herbert. Television Production Handbook. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1976.

Kathleen Scholl is an Assistant Professor at the University of Main at Farmington, where she teaches children's and adolescent literature and methods of teaching secondary English. She has given presentations on the topic of children and television to parent-teacher groups, at professional meetings, and on radio. Kathleen has appeared on an educational series, Focus on Children, speaking on the implications of media impact on children. She is a member of the NCTE Committee on Television Literacy.

SCHOOLS AND TELEVISION: A RESOURCE LIST

CHARLENE R. SMITH

Television and its large student audience are a fact that educators must accept.

> Kenneth Kenniston, chairman of the Carnegie Council on Children, called television the "flickering blue parent occupying more of the waking hours of American school children than any other single influence -- including both parents and school." Nielsen statistics bear him out. By the time the typical American school child graduates from high school, he or she will have spent 11,000 hours in school and 15,000 hours in front of the television.[1]

The educator's role must include helping students use rather than be used by television. This can be accomplished through the provision of skills that enable students to analyze what is seen and heard on television. Television can be an effective and useful tool for learning if teachers tune in to the program choices of students to develop motivating and experiential background materials for academic study.

I have become increasingly concerned about the effect of television on school children. It was also disturbing to know that I was always criticizing commercial television while making absolutely no effort to discover its merit and utilize the medium for its newly detected value. I began to search for a way to connect in-school activities with the time and energy expended by students who habitually watch television at home. At first the search for useful resources in the development of a list of activities to promote the positive use of commercial television brought forth very little information. However, a concentrated effort has expanded my personal list of related resources.

In sharing these resources, it is my hope that school children who are viewing television can be given positive learning alternatives and become more objective viewers.

Each major network is quite willing to establish a harmonious relationship between the classroom and television. Classroom materials for use with commercial television can be obtained from the networks and from various professional organizations.

Write for further information to:

Dr. Pamela N. Warford
Director of Community Relations
ABC Television
1330 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10019

Mr. Jack Blessington
Director of Educational Relations
CBS Television Network
51 West 52nd Street
New York, NY 10019

Dr. Ellen Rodman
NBC, Room 1801
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10020

ACTION FOR CHILDREN'S TELEVISION
46 Austin Street
Newtonville, MA 02160

This is a national nonprofit consumer organization working to encourage diversity and eliminate commercial abuses from children's programming. Membership includes newsletters, campaigns, research information, film and library facilities.

TEACHERS' GUIDE TO TELEVISION
669 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10021

This organization produces a bi-annual publication for schools and parents that includes study guides, program synopses and discussion questions to open up lines of communication between children and their elders about what they see on television. The organization also sponsors Parent Participation Television Workshops.

PRIME TIME SCHOOL TELEVISION
120 S. LaSalle Street
Chicago, IL 60603

As a member one receives study guides for television specials each month plus periodic curriculum projects containing lesson ideas and student activities that focus on a particular television related issue.

CHILDREN'S TELEVISION WORKSHOP
One Lincoln Plaza
New York, NY 10023

C.T.W. is a research and development laboratory that explores new uses of television and related communications media for education and informational purposes. They publish several supplementary items related to the reinforcement of educational lessons from Sesame Street, The Electric Company, and 3-2-1 Contact.

CRITICAL VIEWING SKILLS PROJECT
Education Department
WNET/THIRTEEN
356 W. 58th Street
New York, NY 10019

The U.S. Office of Education has funded four projects to develop teacher and student materials emphasizing the development of critical television viewing skills.

In addition to the above named organizations, teachers can contact the local affiliate of the major networks or public television stations for information regarding broadcasts. I have found the books described below immensely helpful for leading the reader to other resources or in providing lessons that utilize television.

THE ACT GUIDE TO CHILDREN'S TELEVISION Evelyn Kaye Beacon Press Boston 1979	This handbook provides an overview of children's programming, practical advice on how to make television a rewarding part of children's lives, and a comprehensive resource directory of government agencies, broadcast stations, organizations and publications concerned with children's television.
CRITICAL TELEVISION VIEWING Lynne Brenner Ganek, et al. Cambridge New York 1980	A language arts work-a-text designed to use television viewing to support the basic skills taught in the classroom.
NEW SEASON: THE POSITIVE USE OF COMMERCIAL TELEVISION WITH CHILDREN Rosemary Lee Potter Charles E. Merrill Co. Columbus, Ohio 1976	This is a teacher's handbook that suggests ways television can be used effectively as a learning medium. This book also discusses pioneer efforts of educators to come to grips with the pervasive presence of television in children's lives.

These resources were selected because of their usefulness. Many relevant organizations and fine publications were left off the list because they are referred to in the books described above. This list is beneficial to the classroom teacher seeking ideas for including television in the curriculum.

Footnote

[1]Edward B. Fiske, "Values Seen in Conflict," New York Times, Section 12, page 1, April 20, 1980.

Charlene R. Smith is currently on leave of absence from the Detroit Public Schools where she has served for nine years as librarian at Keidan Elementary School. She participated in a two-month study tour of Brazil in 1981 sponsored by Fulbright under the auspices of Michigan State University. Charlene has been a member of MCTE for five years serving on the Elementary-Middle School Committee and the Title II Implementation Committee.